

The Athenian Mercury.

Tuesday, January 8. 1665.

Quest. 1.

AN Neglectus, &c. Whether the neglect of the Canons and constitutions of our Fathers be not the cause of the follies and vices of the Age? Particularly of Canon 13. 35, 59?

Ans. There's no doubt but if those wholesome Laws were once justly and impartially Executed, and the spiritual sword were drawn on all such just occasions, and no other, but we should soon see a new Face of things in our once virtuous and religious Island. For the Relaxation of Discipline must needs cause a prodigious increase to all Debauchery and mischief; and to have good Ecclesiastical Laws at the end of our Prayer-Books, will do no more good than other Laws in our statute-Book, if they be not put in Execution. And no wonder some people are so very angry with those Courts, whose business 'tis to do it, nor any thing strange if they too should be corrupted in the general Depravity of the Nation; nor that some Gentlemen who care for no Reke, but are for a Virtuoso sort of Religion, serve God or let it alone, should be willing and earnest to get this Rod burnt, which one time or other may happen to make 'em smart for their Lewdness; for what have they to do to plead tender Consciences, who show by their actions they have no Conscience at all, or at least if they e're had any, have harden'd it into the same metal with their Laws? Nor would there be any need to call in the secular sword, were but the spiritual well manag'd; nor would Christ be wanting to his Church; but we are apt to believe, both from Experience and Reason, that a just Excommunication would have visible effects on those who now ne're so much despise it, as we are sure it had in the primitive Church, even after the times of the Apostles and Ananias and Sapphira, who were punish'd even with Death it self for sacrilege under the Gospel. As for those Canons the Querist mentions, there's no doubt but they'd have a great influence on manners, if duly executed, as we think there's no Christian Nation in the world, besides the English, who make such Laws only to break 'em. Particularly Canon 13. Of due celebration of Sundays and Holydays, wherein 'tis requir'd; "That all manner of persons within the Church of England shall henceforth celebrate and keep the Lords day, commonly call'd Sunday, and other Holydays, according to Gods holy will and pleasure, and the orders of the Church of England prescrib'd in that behalf, that is, in hearing the word of God read and taught; In private and publick prayers, in acknowledgment of their offences to God, and amendment of the same, in reconciling themselves charitably to their neighbours where displeasure has been, in oftentimes (therefore more then once or twice, or even thrice a year) receiving the Communion of the body and blood of Christ, in visiting of the poor and sick, and using all Sober and Godly conversation. Here's one Canon, which alone, if practis'd, would do the business, and reduce us to Primitive Piety and Virtue. It obliges, we see, [all manner of persons within the Church of England] those therefore who yield it no obedience must not pretend to be of that Church which finds other Employment for her members on Sundays then walking in the Fields in time of Divine service, or making the Taverns the Church, which thousands do so often till we may almost believe they have forgot there's any other.

And as this Canon relates to all Christians, so does the 35, to Ministers, and the Examination of such as are to enter into that sacred office, which, as Dr. Donne says, if a King thinks himself too good for, he's not

good enough, and that those who are in it, mayn't disgrace their Character; this Canon is very strict as to their Examination, which, what it has been formerly we know not, being our selves but just come into the world, but are sure 'tis now as strict and solemn as possible, and have known several persons, some of no ordinary Birth, others of no contemptible Learning, who have been put by, when approaching the Altar, for want of other requisite qualifications. And the people ought to know that they have still so much of a Negative Voice in the ordination of Ministers, that if they can object any thing against the manners of a Clerk, and make it good, he shall be deny'd his orders, and his Majesty has since his coming to the Crown, in his Letter to the Bishops, particularly requir'd 'em to take more then ordinary care of this Canon, as well as of the preferment of those Clerks who are under their Inspection, according to their Piety and Learning, which he assures 'em shall be his own measure in such preferments as are in the Crown; and let Envy it self be Judge whether that promise han't been most sacredly perform'd!

The 3d Canon is the 59. Ministers to catechise every Sunday, (not once or twice in Lent only.) And this is conceiv'd in as strict expressions as any of the rest. "That every Parson, Vicar or Curate, shall, upon every Sunday and Holyday, before Evening-Prayer, for half an Hour, or more, Examine and Instruct the youth and ignorant persons of this Parish, in the Ten Commandments, the Articles of his Belief, and the Lords Prayer (perhaps all the old catechisms, if not more) and shall diligently hear, instruct, and teach them the catechism set forth in the book of Common Prayer (which by the way, none despise but those who don't understand it, and are unjustly prejudic'd against it); and it goes on, all fathers, mothers, masters and mistresses, shall cause their children, servants, and apprentices, which have not learnt the catechism, to come to the Church at the time appointed; obediently to hear, and be order'd by the minister, untill they have learned the same, which if the minister neglect, he's to be first admonish'd, then suspended; at last, if he persist, Excommunicated; and masters and mistresses, &c. to be dealt with in the same manner; nor let us fancy this an antiquated Canon, like that of Priests coats, or night-caps, for the obligation must be perpetual as well as the reason. 'Tis true it lies hard upon the minister where there is but one, as in most Country-cures, and he's oblig'd himself to read prayers and preach twice, nay often three times a Sunday, and ride several miles besides, as is to our knowledge, the case in many places of the nation at a distance from London. All that can be done there is to do all he can, as long as the day and his strength holds, and satisfy himself that how much soever he's despis'd, what e're he suffers here, if he conscientiously discharge his duty in others, as well as this much neglected instance, he knows who has said, "Great shall be his reward in Heaven."

Quest. 2. Whether Inn-keepers, Vintners, and all those who keep publick-houses, which in themselves are not only very convenient, but even almost necessary to the publick, as well as in themselves lawful Trades, when only follow'd on needful occasions, whether they can be so now, as they are corrupted, since they make their chief advantage from the sins of others, and consequently, 'tis often their business to draw more into excess, tho' absolutely forbidden by the word of God, and so many severe threatenings against it: And many men live in habits of this sin for many years. Pray tell me whether these can be said to be in a state of salvation,

tion, consequently whether they ought not to be debar'd the communion, when they ne're so much as intend to forego this course of life, and consequently can be no true penitents?

Ans. Any habit of sin, there's no question, to a Protestant, will conclude a man in a state of eternal misery, without true repentance; and those most surely, wherein men not only do ill things, and have pleasure in them, that do them, but even persuade, and almost force others to sin, going further that way, we are inclin'd to believe, than the Devil himself can do. And this not only in publick houses, but in private too, it having been for many years, almost the only welcome the English give one another, to make the Guest as great a Beast as the Inviter. They deal with one another in drinking as the Abyssine Emperors and Nobility are dealt with in eating; They don't help themselves, but the children and waiters, as Ludolphus tells us, cram 'em with meat, and if any drops upon the Table, up it goes again, a little more moisten'd then before, and not a Goblet to be lost. And this doubtless they think fine eating, and a princely Entertainment, as well as our drunkards do here, to run Liquors into one anothers Hogheads, till the Hoops are ready to fly off. Which he who does, and continues to do, doubtless he's no more fit for the Sacrament, then he is for Heaven. And the ministers duty in that case is sufficiently plain from the Rubric, "That if any of those who intend to communicate be an open and notorious Evil Liver, or have done any wrong to his neighbour by word or deed, so that the congregation be thereby offended, the curate, having Knowledge thereof, shall call him, and advertise him, that in any wise he presume not to come to the Lords Table, till he hath openly declar'd himself to have truly repented and amended, &c."

Quest. 3. Whether there's any Insect which shines in the dark besides a Glowworm, because the Querist lately found a sort of a longish black-fly, different from a Glowworm, which shines in the dark in the same manner?

Ans. A shrow'd knotty Question, that needs a whole Society of Oedipus's to resolve it. But least they shou'd not be found, and we not able, we desire the Querist to read it over himself once more, and see what he can make on't.

THE Poems sent by the Pindarick Lady were received; and 'tis desir'd she would send word to our Bookseller at the Raven in Jewen-street (where she's now desir'd to direct all she sends to our Society) how a Letter may be Directed to her.

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L O N D O N, Printed for John Duntou at the Raven in Jewen-street, 1694